



## ARTS & CULTURE

# Two Million Expected in Hajj Pilgrimage as it Starts in Saudi Arabia

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Over 2 million Muslims are gathered in the Islamic holy city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia, for this year's hajj pilgrimage, or religious trip. The pilgrimage has returned to the usual level of **participation** for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

The pilgrims made their way out of Mecca on Monday after circling Islam's holiest site, the Kaaba. They are gathering in the nearby desert for a day and night of prayer.

The pilgrimage is one of the five **pillars**, or central beliefs, of Islam. The Quran, Islam's holy book, says that all Muslims who are physically and financially able should make the pilgrimage once in their lifetime. It takes place over five days.

The hajj follows a path that Muslims believe their **prophet** Muhammad walked almost 1,400 years ago. The holy walk is seen as a uniting event for the world's 1.8 billion Muslims. Some people spend years saving up money to pay for the trip.

Pilgrims have been circling the Kaaba since arriving in Mecca over recent days. As the last ones performed it Monday, the pilgrims made their way by foot or by bus to Mina. They will camp there in one of the largest **tent** cities in the world.

Mina is a large open space with little to protect people from the sun and intense heat. Soldiers cooled pilgrims with water.

Egyptian businessmen Yehya Al-Ghanam said he was at a loss for words to describe his feelings on arriving at Mina.

He said, "Tears will fall from my eyes out of **joy** and happiness."

Pilgrims pray throughout the day and night before traveling on Tuesday to Mount Arafat. That is where Muhammad is said to have given his final speech.

After Arafat, the pilgrims collect small rocks from a place known as Muzdalifa. They then return to Mina to throw the rocks at three stone walls that represent evil. This is the final act of the hajj.

Then, Muslims begin celebrating the three-day long holiday of Eid al-Adha, or Feast of Sacrifice.

I'm Gregory Stachel.

*Riazat Butt reported this story for The Associated Press. Gregory Stachel adapted it for VOA Learning English.*

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## Words in This Story

**participate** – *v.* to take part in an activity or event with others

**pillar** – *n.* a basic fact, idea, or principle of something

**prophet** – *n.* a member of some religions (such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) who delivers messages that are believed to have come from God

**tent** – *n.* a portable shelter that is used outdoors, is made of cloth (such as canvas or nylon), and is held up with poles and

ropes

**joy** – *n.* a feeling of great happiness

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